



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT of HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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Department of Health Highlights the Importance of HPV Vaccination During Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

Bismarck, N.D. – January is National Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, and the North Dakota Department of Health is reminding adolescent and adult females and males, ages 11 through 26, about the importance of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine for the prevention of cervical and other cancers, according to Mary Woinarowicz, NDIIS Sentinel Site coordinator with the North Dakota Department of Health.

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection and currently affects more than 20 million Americans, with approximately 6 million more people affected each year. Almost all cervical cancer is caused by HPV.

There are currently two vaccines available in the United States for the prevention of HPV infection and their associated cancers. Both vaccines, HPV2 (brand name Cervarix®) and HPV4 (brand name Gardasil®), prevent HPV types 16 and 18, which cause approximately 70 percent of all cervical cancers. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends a three-dose series of HPV vaccine for all adolescents 11 to 12 years of age. The vaccine is most effective when given prior to the onset of sexual activity. A recent study published in the medical journal *PEDIATRICS* showed that HPV vaccination at the recommended ages did not lead to increased sexual activity.

“It is important to be vaccinated against HPV to prevent the disease and its related cancers,” said Woinarowicz. “Anyone not previously vaccinated, even if they are already sexually active, should receive the full three-dose series.”

North Dakota participates in the Vaccines For Children (VFC) federal entitlement program, which provides free vaccine for children 18 years of age and younger who are American Indian, Medicaid-eligible, uninsured, or underinsured (have insurance but it does not cover vaccinations). Most insurance plans cover HPV vaccine. The North Dakota Immunization Program also has an adult

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vaccination program that provides HPV vaccines to uninsured or underinsured adults. Please contact your health-care provider or local public health unit for more information about these vaccine programs.

“HPV vaccination rates in North Dakota are low, with only 55 percent of girls ages 13 through 17 being fully vaccinated,” Woinarowicz said. “North Dakota’s HPV vaccination rates are well below the national average of 71 percent. These low rates are concerning, as unvaccinated North Dakotans are not protected against this serious disease, which causes cancer.”

For more information about the HPV vaccine, contact Mary Woinarowicz, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2404.

– 30 –

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